

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of October 9, 1950

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Theatre Openings

"Pardon Our French"

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Pardon Our French"



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 6, 1950

Olsen and Johnson Back With a Bang

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Riotous musical.
Nature—Half circus, half Paris type.

Mood—Raucous and coy by turns.

Humor—Corn insured by age.
Appeal—Earthy, unembarrassed.
I find it—Supremely escapist.

The names of Olsen and Johnson have become so synonymous with brash practical jokes, wild indignities and headlong clowning that it is easiest to describe "Pardon Our French" by the ways in which it differs from the comic pair's earlier hoe-downs.

Actually the differences are not really so notable. Here at the Broadway are showgirls wandering in the aisles, as well as other performers. There are gunshots,

feathers falling from the ceiling, and endless appearances of midgets, all in the approved style of O. and J.

Breath of Paris.

The major difference is caused by Ole Olsen's broken leg, which restricts his appearance to a box, and a curtain call. The other big difference is that the boys decided to alternate slices of their own particular kind of Wonderland with material supposed to typify the Parisian theater.

As long as this latter idea is no drag on tempo, it is all right. In fact the first act here has more body and pace than any Olsen and Johnson fiesta so far. The second act gets pretty patchy.

There is an elaborate effect of

an elevated train racing out toward the audience, and another in which colored lights turn a Paris sewer into Swan Lake, complete with ballet.

This is the sort of thing that was all the rage in the theater before movies got a foothold. It has faded out so completely that it suddenly seems novel.

And that is in character, for the Olsen and Johnson form of entertainment goes straight to fundamentals. A dancer is at his best whirling around on one foot as long as possible. A seaisack sketch depends for its topper on a bright green mask. There is real rain for the "April" number.

Everywhere at Once.

Chick Johnson becomes the head of the house, turning up anywhere and any time. His glassy stare, his indignant mumbling and his wholesome appreciation of a good, lousy gag, are all strangely endearing.

Marty May takes over for Olsen, besides doing his own stuff. He is a friendly seeming chap who handles the audience astutely without booting it in the teeth with eagerness.

Denise Darcel of the famed structural beauty is surprisingly pleasant in the little given her to do. Her figure is as breath-halting as you thought, and she is obligingly hyper-French in song and attitude.

"PARDON OUR FRENCH"

A revue with music by Victor Young; lyrics by Edward Heyman; sketches written and directed by Olsen and Johnson; musical numbers and dances staged by Ernst and Maria Matray; settings by Albert Johnson; costumes by Jack Mosser; additional music and direction by Harry Sukman; presented by Olsen and Johnson at the Broadway Theatre, October 5, 1950, with a cast including the following:

Olsen and Johnson, Denise Darcel, Marty May, June Johnson, Billy Shirley, Helene Stanley, Patricia Denise, Lubov Roudenko, George Zortich, J. C. Olsen, Fay DeWitt, Nina Varela, Six Mighty Atoms, Billy Kay, M. Millard, Phil Terry, the Konyots, Leo Anthony, Robert Rossellat, John Clampa, Chickie Johnson, Richard Clayton, David Collyer, Howard Joslin, and the Huit Chanteuses.

There are several agreeable singers and dancers, with some emphasis due the comic dancing Konyots, the zip of Lubov Roudenko, the grace of George Zortich and the warmth of a young singer named Fay De Witt.

Daily Mirror

October 6, 1950

'Pardon Our French' Full Of Crude Humor

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson brought their latest adventure in mayhem and nerve-wrack to the Broadway Theatre last evening. It's called "Pardon Our French." It might well be called "Pardon Our Jokes." Ole and Chic have never been noted for subtlety or good taste. In this instance, they appear to have put a "no-stop" limit on their gags and pranks.

The humor—if you can call it that—is sparse. Most of it has to do with the less appealing aspects of sex, the processes of sanitation, anatomical displays usually reserved for the boudoir and leering references to a Parisian street of ill repute. It is designed, we suspect, for those wits who

collect smoking-car wisetracks.

Olsen made but a brief appearance last night, due, we hear, to an injury. And no wonder! We feel lucky today that we escaped hospitalization. We always have a look at our insurance policy before venturing into one of Ole's and Chic's frenzied fiestas.

But they let us off with relative safety the opening night. True, they dumped a few bags full of feathers on us during the first act. So those who were allergic to feathers fled under the balcony for protection. And by the time we had gotten the feathers out of our hair and clothing, they sent an agile acrobat leaping around the boxes and balcony and jumping over the occupants of the orchestra. The lady just in front of us winced and sagged as the stuntman dug a foot into her collar bone.

In Olsen's absence, Marty May has teamed with Johnson to shenanigans and branigans. Marty is a clever comic, worthy of better material. Denise Darcel has little to do, but looks lovely and does it better than you would expect of the average movie star.

Lubov Roudenko, George Zortich and Patricia Denise contribute lively ballet sequences.

Miss Roudenko's whirlwind turns won her a big hand. The Konyots stopped the show with their amusing satire on adagio teams. Bill Shirley has a voice that should catch the attention of some recording executive. But Victor Young and Edward Heyman haven't composed a score that shows him to best advantage.

The sets by Albert Johnson and costumes by Jack Mosser are highlights of "Pardon Our French." They are opulent and eye-filling.

Olsen and Johnson have developed a large and loyal following. In fairness to them, we should report that a majority of the first-nighters laughed and applauded robustly. As for us, we were kept pretty busy scouting for concealed booby traps, dodging feathers, flying feet and corn. By the way, if you intend to see "Pardon Our French," you had better leave the children at home. Otherwise you're going to have a lot of explaining to do.

"Pardon Our French"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
October 6, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Smoking-Car Revue

OLSEN and Johnson are still laboring under the delusion that pandemonium, uproar and off-color jokes constitute theatrical hilarity. "Pardon Our French," which has opened at the Broadway Theatre, is a monumantal bore. Although it was supposed to refrain from the pair's customary indignities on an audience, it commits several nuisances, including one dangerous intermezzo which has a human fly jumping around on the shoulders

of customers. The chief clowns jest drearily; Denise Darcel waves her posterior, and there are a lot of singers and dancers accompanied by dreary musical numbers.

The sponsor-stars are mirthless enough when they are performing with the aid of cap pistols, female get-ups and anatomical props, but they outdo themselves as sketch writers. In a vague effort to follow the title they have involved such unfortunates as Leo Anthony, Miss Darcel, Helene Stanley, Patricia Denise and June Johnson in numbers called "No. 96 rue Blondell," "An Evening With Marie Antoinette," or "A Night on the Ile de France." Then there is a pretentious production climax to Act I, "A Face in the Crowd"

which shifts abruptly from doleful pantomime to arrant slapstick and winds up in a ballet. All that is wanting in the scenes is wit or craftsmanship.

The nearest thing to a bit of agreeable illusion is conjured up in "There's No Man Like a Snowman." Surprisingly enough this has Miss Stanley dancing prettily with engaging backdrops and costumes. It has no trace of the Olsen and Johnson trademark. The latter is dismally evident in the frantically unfunny "Tourist Service" and "Life of a Salesman." Most of "Pardon Our French" stems from the smoking car and lacks even the smart innuendo which is to be found in French music hall acts.

It is small wonder that a large company has bumpy going in the revue. Marty May alone rises above the general level of ennui, doing some very funny things with a violin in a monologue. The veteran has wonderful assurance and split second timing which stands him in good stead, even when he is teamed with Chic Johnson. Ernst and Maria Matry are responsible for the dances, if they want to claim that dubious credit. Victor Young and Edward Heyman have fashioned most of the songs. And Albert Johnson has used sound effects and scenic mumbo-jumbo to keep the scenery animated even though the proceedings are not. Olsen and Johnson have done it again.

The New York Times
October 6, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Acquiring culture with the years, Olsen and Johnson have given their new show a Continental atmosphere. "Pardon Our French," they call it in honor of Denise Darcel, a crisp French blonde, and in recognition of Albert Johnson's interesting Parisian scenery.

Since the French songs and French dances are perfunctory and routine, and since Mlle. Darcel has no material, the excursion

across the Atlantic is not very profitable. Everything looks lovely, particularly when Albert Johnson plays tricks with the scenery. But most of the overseas material is like an expensive stage wait.

But with a little professional direction by someone with taste as well as hard-headedness, "Pardon Our French" might be a very funny show. For Olsen and Johnson, rowdy-dowds of the old school, have some loud, amusing and inventive ideas. Since Olsen has a game leg, caused doubtless by tripping over a gag, he is not much in evidence at the moment. Marty May, a notably congenial mountebank, is wearing Olsen's shoes.

This column would like to pay its respects to an original and capital number called "The Flower Song." Nothing could be simpler—a chair with a long fan or palm

leaf tied to the back. May sings a lugubrious, sentimental ballad. Looking very sad and muttering to himself, Johnson sits dolefully through the song, coming to life for a minute or two for the chorus when he plays a few bars on the harmonica and sways back and forth in the chair.

If we are not all careful, someone is going to put this on the record as commedia dell'arte. For it is simple and uproarious and something of an inspiration. You could say almost as much for the unsteady scene in which Johnson tries to shave with an old-fashioned razor in a Pullman car that is taking the curves at dangerous speed; and you can also place your laughs pretty well down in the diaphragm when Johnson makes a rough crossing of the Atlantic in a rocking

cabin on the Ile de France. Two minutes more and the audience would need Mother Sill's patent remedy.

As usual, Olsen and Johnson have garnished the dish with a little man in a great hat racing across the stage, some toilet humor, trick devices and bedlam. Thanks to Albert Johnson's original mind, the scenery not only is good looking but animated enough to take your mind off the corny culture.

On the whole, "Pardon Our French" is a pretty heavy show with long interludes of dullness. But every now and then, it comes up with an excellent burlesque antic. Someone who really appreciates Olsen and Johnson ought to winnow out the heaps of chaff and make a genuine and vigorous show out of them.

DAILY NEWS
October 6, 1950

'Pardon Our French' Quite Sedate For an Olsen-Johnson Production

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Pardon Our French," which opened last evening at the Broadway Theatre, Ole Olsen is not around much, having broken or possibly shot his foot; but Chic Johnson is around all the time, and with Marty May as a helper manages quite a bit of the old-time O & J roughhouse. The revue is big and pleasantly gaudy, and Albert Johnson has pulled some nifty scenic tricks—but I wish it were funny oftener.

The girls are pretty and seem to be friendly little souls, for they are constantly wagging. The chief attraction, aside from Ole, Chic and Marty, seems to be a French blonde, Denise Darcel, who has deep chest tones and a deeper décolletage. She is, one might say, wired for sight.

Olsen and Johnson have been telling interviewers that they have reformed and that "Pardon Our French" is not one of their old riots, but something new like the "Folies Bergere." Audiences, they have said, will not be getting presents like pigs and fowl and cakes of ice, but will be left strictly alone.

Not Quite Reformed.

This is not quite true. First thing that happened was that a beeyootiful girl came along and

squirited people in the ear, including me, with perfume. A bit later Chic shot one of his guns and brought down a couple of bagsful of feathers upon the audience—an assault which caused one drama critic to scamper up the aisle in terror. Then, about an hour later a monkey-man leaped from stage to balcony, skipped gaily across the top of the house, plunged to the stage, hopped the orchestra pit and skittered over the backs of chairs, thereby unnerving the critic all over again. Also, a very angry woman in the audience (an O & J employe, of course) fixed a baleful glance upon Brooks Atkinson, the benign reviewer for the stately Times, and roared, "You and your bloodshot eyes!" Brooks made no

reply—but if she had picked on me I'd have sassed her right back and said, "You ought to see them from MY side."

A Song, a Joke.

Somehow, most of what went on on the stage was not so interesting. There are song numbers and dance numbers and I couldn't tell one from the other, but a Miss Bunty Pendleton, a very good singer who happened to be in the audience, tells me that "I Ought to Know More About You" is a very hot song. There is a funny scene in which Johnson and May get lost in a Paris sewer and meet some strange characters, including a mummy who says he has been in the cellar for 2,000 years. "Must be the St. Louis Browns," says Johnson. The most amusing scene is one in which May sings a foolish little song while Johnson mutters imprecations under his breath.

The boys have a great big public and I hope their old friends will flock to see them again and once more sniff the heady odor of gunpowder. But I don't suppose I'll be going back—unless it is to try to find out how Miss Darcel's consumer, one Ernst Schrap, keeps her in stitches.